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Multilingualism

Questions related to information

Letter dated 11 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the letter addressed to you on 11 April by the 20 permanent representatives of the Spanish-speaking States Members of the United Nations concerning the use of the Spanish language in United Nations public information documents and the promotion of a multilingual philosophy in the Organization's activities.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under items 44 and 102 of the preliminary list of items to be included in the provisional agenda of the fifty-sixth regular session.

(*Signed*) Jorge Eduardo **Navarrete**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mexico
to the United Nations

* A/56/50.

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Annex to the letter dated 11 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

11 April 2001

We are writing to you on behalf of the Spanish-speaking States Members of the United Nations to express our concern at the unfortunate trend with regard to Spanish in the public information services within the United Nations system.

This negative development is yet another indication of the growing imbalance throughout the United Nations system among the various official and working languages, and the tendency to favour the use of only one language within the secretariats of the organizations of the United Nations system. The countries of our linguistic community also note with regret the presence of this trend in the drafting and circulation of major publications and even in the negotiation of resolutions and decisions in governing bodies, and, at times, in the relations which some of the secretariats have with Member States.

It is generally well known that Spanish, together with other languages, enjoys legal status as an official language of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. In this regard, the General Assembly has expressly requested that the Spanish language, like the other languages which enjoy official status, be given equal treatment in the area of public information. We are sorry to say, however, that this is not happening.

The proof is the content of the Organization's page on the Internet, which has become one of the most glaring examples of the failure to accord equal treatment to the official languages. The gulf is widening between public information available in Spanish and that available in English, as you recognized in your recent report circulated under the title "Continued multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site" (A/AC.198/2001/8).

This situation is disturbing and alarming to those we represent, to 20 States Members of the Organization whose language is Spanish. Today, Spanish, in addition to being one of the six official languages of the United Nations, is an international language spoken all over the world by approximately 400 million persons; according to demographic forecasts, this number will reach 550 million in 2050. Moreover, it is a language which already has 21 million users on the Internet, where it has witnessed exponential growth.

The experience of recent years has convinced us that the Organization is still far from complying with the General Assembly's request in its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, namely, that "the texts of all new public documents, in all six official languages, and information materials of the United Nations [be] made available through the United Nations Web site daily".

We wish to appeal to your good offices to ensure that the necessary measures are taken, without any delay whatever, to mitigate the alarming increase in the imbalance among the official languages of the United Nations in all areas in which it is occurring and, in particular, that the Organization's existing language policy be rigorously applied to public information, and that, to that end, Spanish sections, with adequate personnel and means, be established in both the Department of Public

Information and its news service and, in general, in all departments authorized to publish official information about the United Nations on the Internet.

The genuine and ongoing practice of multilingualism should be a constant in the daily work of our Organization. This is not only a matter of principle but also an effective way for the United Nations to present itself as a global institution that is truly representative of the entire world.

Signed by the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations of: Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela